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ABSTRACT

The Substance Use Prevention Education and Resources (SUPER I) program of the Austin Independent School District (Texas) is a school-based middle- and high-school curriculum that is offered as a positive alternative to long-term removals to students who have committed alcohol or drug-related offenses for the first time (excluding the sale or distribution of controlled substances). SUPER I was begun in the middle schools and expanded to all 10 high schools in the spring of 1996-97. In 1996-97, of 1,502 students removed from classes for alcohol or drug-related problems, 224 elected to enter SUPER I, and 176 completed the program. The majority of program staff rated the program as effective in deterring student use of illegal substances and in improving family communications. Recommendations are made for continuing the program, especially tracking students to determine long-term effectiveness of SUPER I. Increased promotion of SUPER I to campus staff as a positive alternative to long-term removal is also recommended. It is also suggested that the program continue to support a team approach to session presentations. (Contains 10 figures.) (SLD)

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ED 419 830

Austin Independent School District

SUPER I

1996-97 Pilot Program Year-End Report

Department of Accountability, Student Services, and Research

Office of Program Evaluation

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AUSTIN INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT
Department of Accountability, Student Services, & Research
Office of Program Evaluation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: SUPER I PILOT PROGRAM EVALUATION 1996-97

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Overview

SUPER I (Substance Use Prevention Education and Resources) is a school-based, middle- and high-school curriculum which is offered as a positive alternative to long-term removals to students who have committed alcohol or drug-related offenses for the first time (excluding offenses involving the sale or distribution of controlled substances). SUPER I was begun as a pilot program in AISD middle schools in the fall semester, and was expanded to include all 10 high schools in the spring semester. The programmatic goals of SUPER I are stopping short- and long-term substance abuse among the targeted population; improving family communication skills; and, promoting family involvement in support services.

Budget

Funding Sources:
Federal & Private
(Motorola, Inc./Pathways)

Funding Amount:
$10,820 (Motorola)
$24,043 (Federal)

Major Findings

1. In 1996-97, 459 of the 1,502 (30.5%) removed to the ALC were admitted for reasons related to alcohol or drug use (AOD) or possession. Of this number, 224 elected to enter the SUPER I program, and 176 completed the program.
2. Although high school students were not admitted to the SUPER I program until the spring semester, nearly as many (106) participated in the program as middle school students (118) who were eligible to participate the entire year.
3. SUPER I participants were more likely to have used cigarettes, beer, liquor, and marijuana recently and more often than secondary students in general.
4. Of the 176 who completed the program, 29 later returned to the ALC, but only three (1.7%) were referred for subsequent AOD offenses.
5. The majority of program staff rated the program as effective in deterring student use of illegal substances and in improving family communications.

Recommendations

1. Continue tracking of first-year program students to assess long-term effectiveness of SUPER I.
2. Edit and update materials to reflect problems and conditions associated with area communities and schools.
3. Make better use of transition facilitators by clarifying their roles and responsibilities.
4. Strengthen the promotion of SUPER I as a positive alternative to long-term removal to campus staff.
5. Improve efforts to gather follow-up information from SUPER I families and students on long-term program effectiveness.
6. The program should continue to support a team approach to session presentations.

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INTRODUCTION

Program Overview

SUPER I (Substance Use Prevention Education and Resources) is a school-based, middle- and high-school curriculum which is offered as a positive alternative to long-term removals to students who have committed alcohol or drug-related offenses for the first time (excluding offenses involving the sale or distribution of controlled substances). The SUPER I program was developed by the Metropolitan Atlanta Council on Alcohol and Drugs (MACAD). With corporate assistance from Motorola, Inc. and in partnership with Pathways Community Counseling, SUPER I was begun as a pilot program in AISD middle schools in the fall semester, and was expanded to include all 10 high schools in the spring semester. The main programmatic goals of SUPER I are:

- Stopping short- and long-term substance abuse among the targeted population;
- Improving family communication skills; and,
- Promoting family involvement in support services.

The primary incentive for participation is an abbreviated term of two weeks, rather than the standard six weeks, at the district's Alternative Learning Center (ALC). If the student and his or her parents (or other significant adult) completed the voluntary, eight-hour, four-session program, the remainder of the student's removal was served on an in-school basis, thereby keeping the young person in school under supervision and preventing the student from falling further behind in his studies. For the purposes of the pilot program, all students' referral histories to the ALC prior to the 1996-97 school year, including any referrals for drug- or alcohol-related reasons, were ignored, and all students referred to the ALC were considered first-time offenders in the pilot year.

Funding

Motorola, Inc. the corporate sponsor, provided support for travel, initial training, and one set of program materials. In addition, Motorola supported one training cycle per month in the fall semester, and two cycles in the spring semester, through Pathways; all additional cycles were funded through the Title IV Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities (SDFSC) grant. The Motorola/Pathways partnership expended a total of $10,820 for their portion of the SUPER I project. For the 1996-97 school year, $62,190 was budgeted from the SDFSC grant. Of this sum, $24,043 had been spent through July 31. Funds from both sources were used primarily for start-up and operations, including:

- purchasing SUPER I materials from MACAD;
- stipends for training the facilitators;
- extra-duty pay for facilitators (the sessions were presented in after-school, evening sessions);
- program planning and consultation.

Per-student/family cost for the program is calculated below. However, it should be noted that this figure includes initial start-up costs (e.g., materials acquisition, training, and travel), in

addition to annual program operating costs. It can be expected that per-family cost will be lower in subsequent years of the program. Program costs are summarized in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: SUPER I Funding Summary

Budget Source	Amount
Motorola/Pathways	$10,820
Title IV (SDFSC)	24,043
Total Program Budget	**$34,863**
Cost per student family	$34,863/224 = ***$155.63***

In addition, the district also provided Spanish-language translations of program materials to better serve some SUPER I families. The district agreed to provide the translated materials to MACAD for an in-kind exchange of additional materials, including booklets and videotapes, and future typesetting and provision of Spanish-language materials.

EVALUATION SCOPE AND METHOD

The evaluation focused on the impact of the SUPER I program in reducing student repeaters to the ALC. A database of all referred students was established and maintained as the basis for longitudinal study. In the first year, students from three cycles were selected for tracking purposes.

Students in all SUPER I cycles for three separate months were administered OPE's *Student Alcohol and Other Drug Use Survey (SAODUS)*, an instrument which asks secondary students to report on recent and long-term substance use and attitudes toward use. Participants were asked to complete the survey immediately prior to their first SUPER I session. Two scales, the *Parent-Adolescent Communication Survey* and the *Family Satisfaction Survey*, developed at the University of Minnesota's Center for Family Social Research, were employed as measures to assess the effectiveness of SUPER I in improving family communications skills. These two instruments were intended to be repeated three months after completion of SUPER I as post-program measures; however, the return rate for these surveys was unacceptably low, so no comparisons could be made to determine program gains with these instruments.

SUPER I program facilitators, co-facilitators, and police officers also completed evaluation forms at the conclusion of each cycle, enabling program staff to determine which students/families did or did not complete the cycle. In addition to the above measures, surveys of key program staff, including ALC staff, home campus transition facilitators, and principals were also conducted to gather a more complete picture of the effectiveness of the SUPER I program.

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STUDENTS AND FAMILIES SERVED

Of the 1,502 students removed to the district's Alternative Learning Center in 1996-97, 459 (30.5%) were admitted for reasons related to alcohol or illegal substances, including simple possession of alcohol or drugs (AOD), or for being under the influence of these substances. (Students committing AOD offenses formed the second largest group of referrals to ALC, only behind those students referred for persistent misbehavior.) Of this number, 224 students entered the SUPER I program. Because high school students who committed AOD offenses were not eligible to participate in SUPER I until the spring semester, there was a disparity between the total number of high school students referred to the ALC for AOD offenses and the number of students entering SUPER I.

Figure 2, shown on the following page, summarizes demographic and academic performance characteristics of the secondary students served by SUPER I. The analysis by the Office of Program Evaluation's GENESYS (*GEN*eric *E*valuation *SYS*tem) reveals several important distinctions between the student population served by SUPER I and the regular AISD secondary population:

Attendance rates in both semesters for middle/junior high school SUPER I students were markedly lower than for nonprogram students, and were slightly lower for SUPER I high school students, compared to their nonprogram peers. SUPER I students at both secondary levels do not fare as well in the classroom as nonprogram students. Grade averages for both middle/junior high and high school students in the program were lower by eight to eleven percentage points in both the fall and spring semesters than grade averages for nonprogram students.

A majority (57%) of middle school referrals were from low-income families; only 30% of high school referrals were from low-income families. A substantial proportion of program students were overage for grade by at least one year (39% MS/JHS, 41% HS). Twenty-five percent of middle/junior high school referrals and 16% of high school referrals were special education students.

Figure 2: Characteristics of SUPER I Students, 1996-97

Student Characteristics	Middle School / Junior High School		High School	
Sex	81% Male 19% Female		81% Male 19% Female	
Ethnicity	18% Afr. Am. 57% Hispanic 25% Other		12% Afr. Am. 42% Hispanic 46% Other	
Low Income	57%		30%	
Overage for Grade	39%		41%	
LEP	5%		1%	
Special Education	25%		16%	
Gifted/ Talented	3%		4%	
Average Number of Rs	2.48 (Fall) 2.57 (Spring)		2.19 (Fall) 2.39 (Spring)	
Grade Average	SUPER I 73.1 (F) 72.6 (S)	All MS 83.5 (F) 83.4 (S)	SUPER I 70.9 (F) 67.2 (S)	All HS 78.8 (F) 78.9 (S)
Average Attendance	SUPER I 85% (F)* 81% (S)*	All MS 94.6% (F) 92.3% (S)	SUPER I 88.2% (F) 82.5% (S)	All HS 90.4% (F) 87.8% (S)

Source: AISD Student Master Files
*(Note: F=Fall, S=Spring)

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Figure 3 summarizes the number of students and families served by the program at the high school and middle/junior high school level, according to whether or not they completed the SUPER I program.

Figure 3: 1996-97 SUPER I Participation, Completers vs. Non-Completers

Student Participants	Middle School		High School		Total	
Completers	87	39.01%	89	39.73%	176	78.57%
Non-completers	31	13.83%	17	7.59%	48	21.43%
Total	118	52.67%	106	47.32%	224	100%

Source: 1996-97 Alternative Learning Center Year-End Report

Of the 224 students who participated in SUPER I, slightly more than half were from junior high or middle schools (118, or 52.67%). However, high school students were only admitted to the program in the spring semester, yet the number of referrals from high schools (106, or 47.32%) was nearly equal to that from junior high/middle schools for both the fall and spring semesters. Overall, approximately 79% of all students who enrolled in SUPER I completed the two-week program, resulting in abbreviated stays at the ALC. Because it is a condition of the program for parents (or other adults) to attend all sessions, students may have failed to complete all four sessions due to adult absence. However, the percentage of students failing to complete the cycle for this reason is unknown. The percentages of students from high schools and middle/junior high schools forming the completers group were nearly equal (high schools = 50.85%, middle/junior high schools = 49.14%); however, middle school students formed a large majority of the noncompleters group (middle/junior high schools = 65% vs. high school = 35%).

Figure 4 summarizes the levels of adult participation for 341 SUPER I sessions for which attendance data were available. Of these sessions, students' mothers attended 262 (77%) sessions, and fathers attended 101 sessions (30%). However, only 56 (16%) of the sessions were attended by both parents. Sessions in which an older sibling, guardian, or other significant adult attended with the student constituted 13% of the total sessions.

Figure 4: SUPER I Family Participation Levels, 1996-97 *

Family Attendance Data	# of Sessions
Number of sessions with the mother attending:	262
Number of sessions with the father attending:	101
Number of sessions with both parents attending:	56
Number of sessions with a sibling attending:	10
Number of sessions with a guardian attending:	16
Number of sessions with an "other adult" attending:	20
Total number of student-sessions with attendance data (4 sessions per cycle X # students)	341

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STUDENT SUBSTANCE USE SELF-REPORT

Students entering all cycles of SUPER I in three separate months were asked to voluntarily complete the *Student Alcohol and Other Drug Use Survey* (SAODUS), an instrument which is used in the district to assess levels of use and attitudes of students toward use of alcohol and other drugs. Students were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. Results of these survey items were compared to identical items on the *Student Substance Use and Safety Survey* (a more recent version of the SAODUS), which was administered to secondary campuses districtwide in the spring. Figures 4 through 7 contrast self-reported use of cigarettes, beer, liquor, and marijuana between SUPER I students and a random sample of all AISD secondary students. Comparisons should be made with caution due to differences in sample size, survey conditions, and general population differences between the two groups. Keeping this caveat in mind, the survey data suggest:

- A much smaller proportion of SUPER I students reported that they do not use cigarettes (47%) compared to the overall student population (74%). A much higher proportion of SUPER I students appear to be heavy smokers (27% reported smoking 20+ times in the previous month) compared to all secondary students (8%). (See Figure 5.)

- SUPER I students also reported drinking beer more frequently in the past month than secondary students overall, and a smaller proportion (58%) said they did not drink beer than in the overall student population (72%). Only small percentages (SUPER I=4%, overall population=3%) of each group reported heavy beer drinking (20+ times) in the previous month. (See Figure 6.)

- Usage pattern differences for liquor between the two groups are similar to beer-consumption patterns, but slightly higher percentages of both groups reported they did not use liquor (SUPER I=61%, overall population=76%). SUPER I students were more than twice as likely to have consumed liquor in the previous month (28%) than secondary students overall (13%). Percentages of students in both groups reporting heavy use was low (0%-2%). (See Figure 7.)

- Perhaps the most pronounced difference in the two groups was in their self-reported recent use of marijuana. Though 78% of secondary students overall reported not using marijuana, only 45% of the SUPER I students reported the same. Furthermore, nearly twice the percentage (15%) of SUPER I students reported using marijuana occasionally (one or two times in the previous month) as secondary students (8%). The greatest contrast was among those reporting relatively heavy usage rates (11-19 times). Thirty-four percent (34%) of SUPER I students reported this rate of usage in contrast to only 2% of the overall student population. (See Figure 8.)

Figure 5: Self-Reported 30-Day Use of Cigarettes,
SUPER I vs. All AISD Secondary Students, 1996-97

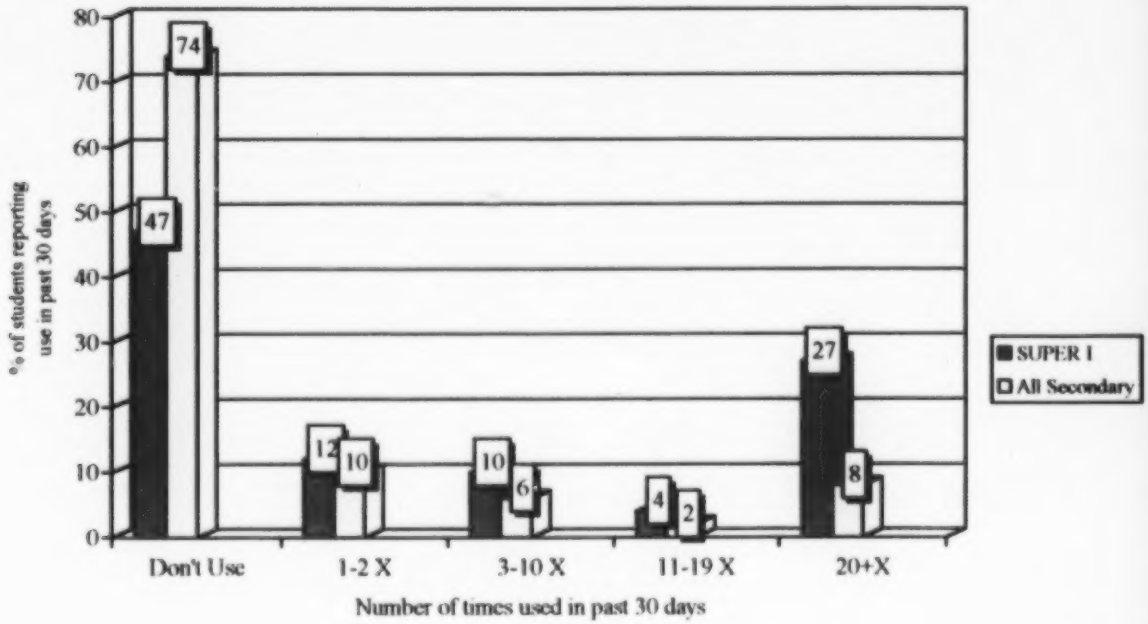


Figure 6: Self-Reported 30-Day Use of Beer,
SUPER I vs. All AISD Secondary Students, 1996-97

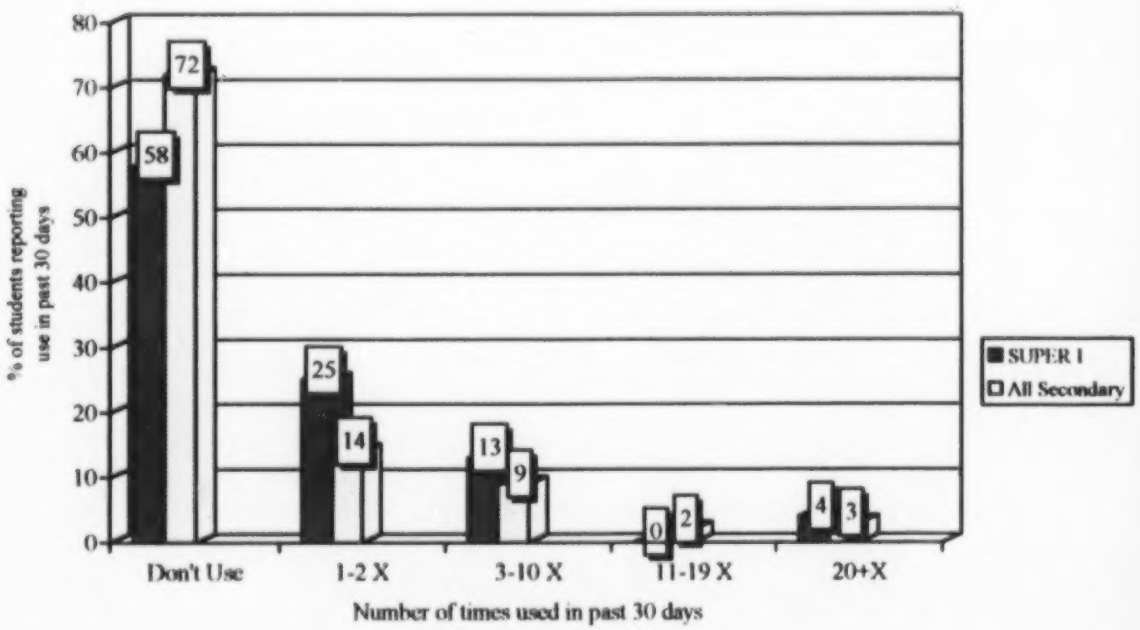


Figure 7: Self-Reported 30-Day Use of Liquor,
SUPER I vs. All AISD Secondary Students, 1996-97

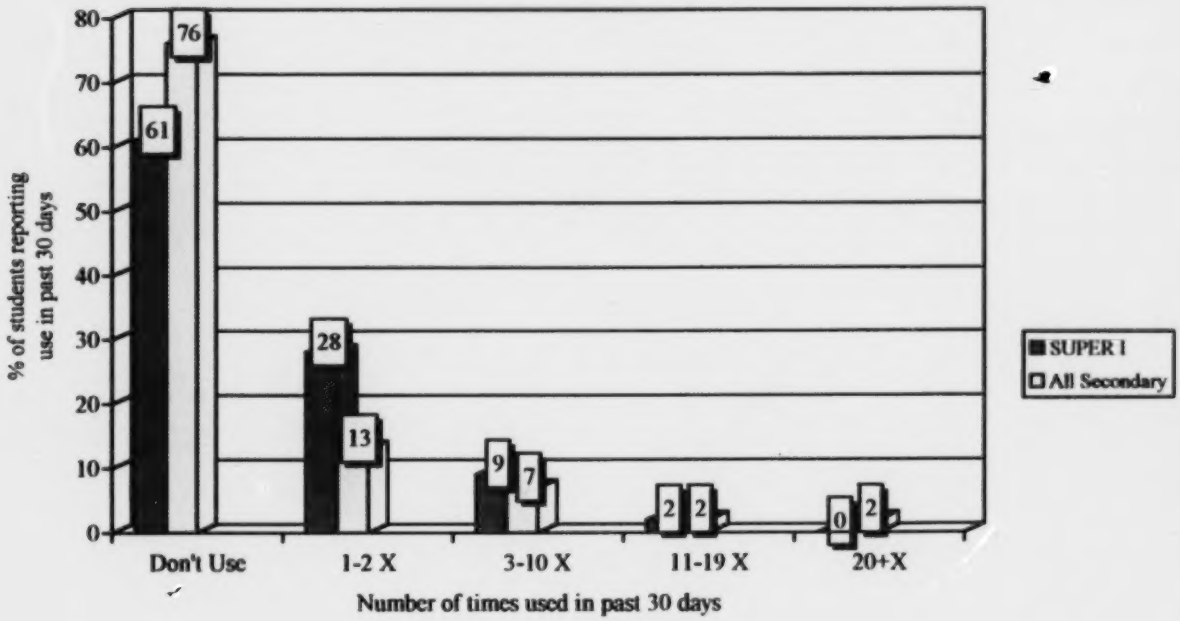
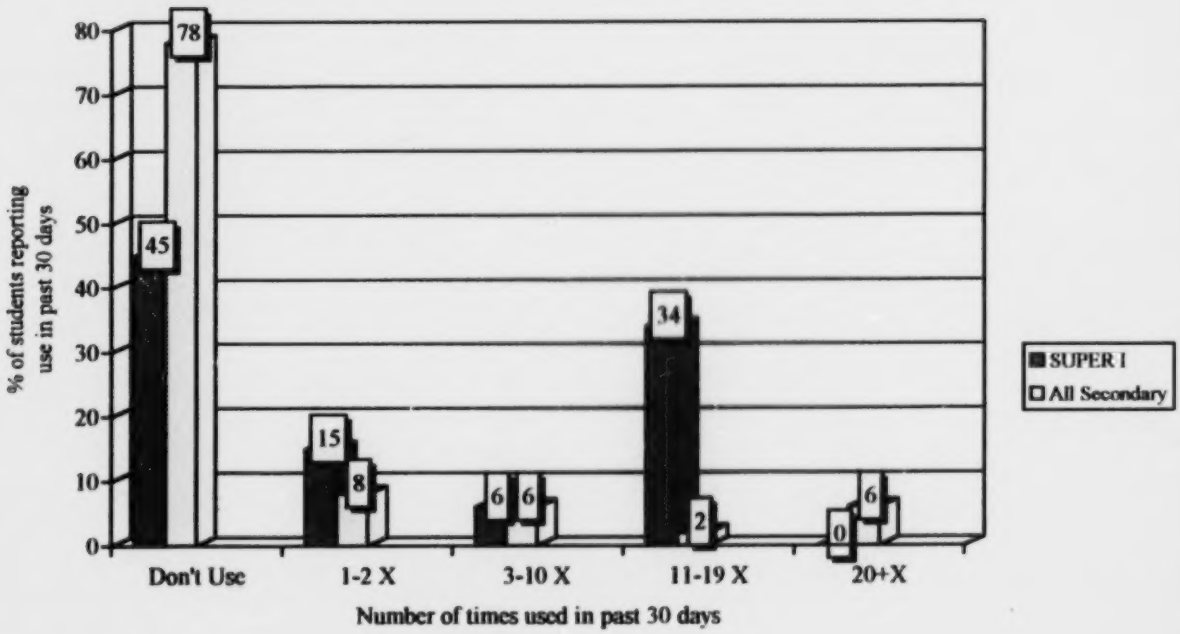


Figure 8: Self-Reported 30-Day Use of Marijuana,
SUPER I vs. All AISD Secondary Students, 1996-97



MEASURES AND PERCEPTIONS OF PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS

Figure 9 shows the level of ALC "repeaters" among SUPER I referrals; i.e., those students who were removed to the ALC more than one time in the 1996-97 school year. The numbers below the row labeled "Repeaters (All)" includes SUPER I participants who were enrolled at the ALC more than once in the 1996-97 school year for all reasons, including alcohol and drug-related offenses. Overall, there was a total of 29 return referrals among SUPER I completers, yielding a return rate of 16.5% among the completers. However, only three students among the program completers returned to the ALC for alcohol or drug-related (AOD) reasons, yielding a recidivism rate of 1.7% for the completers. Overall, a total of six students, completers and noncompleters alike, were returned to the ALC for AOD-related reasons for an overall recidivism rate of 2.7% for all participants. No SUPER I participants returned to the ALC for AOD-related reasons more than once. For purposes of comparison, the total repeat enrollment rate at the ALC in 1996-97 was 12.38%.

Figure 9: ALC Repeaters Among SUPER I Participants, 1996-97

SUPER I Participants	Middle School		High School		Total	
Completers	87		89		176	
Noncompleters	31		17		48	
Total SUPER I Participants	**118**		**106**		**224**	
Repeaters (All)	*Once*	*Twice*	*Once*	*Twice*	*Once*	*Twice*
Completers	18	2	9	0	27	2
Noncompleters	9	0	2	0	11	0
Total	**27**	**2**	**11**	**0**	**38**	**2**
Recidivists (AOD)	*Once*	*Twice*	*Once*	*Twice*	*Once*	*Twice*
Completers	1	0	2	0	3	0
Noncompleters	3	0	0	0	3	0
Total	**4**	**0**	**2**	**0**	**6**	**0**

Source: 1996-97 Alternative Learning Center Year-End Report

SUPER I program facilitators, co-facilitators, and AISD police officers were asked to estimate the effectiveness of SUPER I in achieving two of the primary goals of the program: 1) Deterring student alcohol and drug use, and 2) Improving family communications. Figure 9 summarizes program personnel's perceptions of the effectiveness of SUPER I in achieving its primary goals of deterring student use of drugs and alcohol and in improving family communication skills, based on surveys completed at the end of each of 30 cycles. While most respondents rated SUPER I favorably overall, their responses tended to favor the program's impact on family communications (95% rated it as "Somewhat Effective" or "Very Effective") over its effectiveness in deterring student use of drugs and alcohol (69% of responses rated it as "Somewhat Effective" or "Very Effective" in this area). Figure 10 summarizes their responses.

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Figure 10: SUPER I Staff Perceptions of Program Effectiveness

Program Objectives	[illegible]	[illegible]	AISD [illegible]	[illegible]
[illegible] use of alcohol				
Very Effective	5	9	3	17 (24%)
Somewhat Effective	19	12	4	35 (49%)
Neutral	2	8	5	15 (21%)
Somewhat Ineffective	1	1	0	2 (3%)
Very Ineffective	0	0	0	0 (0%)
No answer	0	3	0	3 (4%)
Improves family communication				
Very Effective	10	15	3	28 (39%)
Somewhat Effective	15	17	6	8 (54%)
Neutral	1	0	3	4 (6%)
Somewhat Ineffective	0	0	0	0 (0%)
Very Ineffective	0	0	0	0 (0%)
No answer	0	1	0	1 (1%)

(*One facilitator stated that SUPER I was effective for those whose drug use was minor, but less effective for those who use drugs and alcohol regularly.)

Source: AISD Department of Accountability, Student Services, and Research SUPER I Facilitator Surveys

The facilitators, co-facilitators, and police officers were also given space on the survey forms for additional comments. These comments followed several major themes:

- The most common suggestions for improving the program were to update the materials and to include data and statistics pertinent to Austin and Texas, and to require both parents to attend all sessions if both live in the home.
- Activities and program materials required more than the time allotted.
- SUPER I is seen as a positive first step in getting parents and students to communicate about problems at home and at school.
- 92% of facilitators and co-facilitators stated a preference for a team approach to program presentation. The majority of the respondents stated that they shared responsibilities for facilitation of activities equally.
- 24% of facilitators (including co-facilitators and police officers) reported utilizing their own materials in their presentations, including pencils, refreshments, knowledge, and personal experiences.

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- Practice makes perfect. Staff scheduling and materials availability became increasingly efficient during the course of the first year.

A survey was also mailed to the principals of the 25 secondary campuses in the district. Surveys were returned from three middle/junior high schools and from four high schools. The principals were asked to agree or disagree with, and comment on, the statement, "The SUPER I program for students with first-time drug and alcohol offenses had a generally positive effect on students' behavior following their completion of the program." Responses to this statement were mixed. Two responses indicated agreement with the statement, two disagreed, and one disagreed strongly. Two offered no opinion. Those agreeing with the statement did so without comment. Comments from those in disagreement included an opinion that the program was too short to effect any lasting, meaningful change. The only suggestions for modifying and improving the program was that of offering the program at the campuses to more closely tailor the program to the needs of the students at that campus.

A similar survey was also mailed to the ALC transition facilitators at the 25 secondary campuses. Thirteen surveys (52%) were returned. Of the thirteen responses, six (46%) agreed or strongly agreed that SUPER I had had a positive effect on students behaviors, two disagreed (15%), and five (39%) offered no opinion. Additional comments and suggestions from the transition coordinators included:

- Anecdotal reports of improved behavior after the student returns to his or her home campus.
- Some believe that some students continue to offend once they are returned to their home campus, but are more careful not to be apprehended.
- A number of the facilitators expressed the opinion that the real strength of SUPER I lies in its ability to reestablish communications within families, and in helping parents confront their childrens' substance use and other school-related problems.

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND NEXT STEPS

The SUPER I program has demonstrated considerable success in its first year of operation. As with many pilot programs, there were some inconsistencies and unanticipated problems in the early stages, but the staff and steering committee were able to devise solutions as they arose. Several recommendations for program improvement arose during the course of the first year, among them:

- Strong support for continuing a team approach (facilitator/co-facilitator) to session presentation;
- Editing and updating of program materials to reflect problems and conditions particularly associated with Austin and central Texas communities and schools;
- Greater promotion to principals and other campus personnel of SUPER I as a positive alternative to long-term removal;
- Making better use of the home campus transition facilitators by clarifying their roles and responsibilities in the program;

- Exploring the possibilities for establishing SUPER I-like programs at the campus-level; and,
- Improving efforts to gather follow-up information from SUPER I families and students on long-term program effectiveness.

Plans are being made to continue tracking of the pilot program students for repeat offenses (AOD and other) as a measure of the long-term effectiveness of the program, as well as tracking students who enter the program as first-time offenders in its second year. In the second year, the evaluation will endeavor to include long-term follow-up measures on the progress of students and their families.

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